

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 5689

THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAM WAS SENT ACTION NEW DELHI INFO BOMBAY,
MADRAS AND DACCA 11 APRIL 1975 AND IS REPEATED TO YOU FOR
ACTION/INFORMATION.

QUOTE:

C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 0610

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF PINT IN
SUBJECT: DESERTION OF DANDAKARANYA REFUGEES TO WEST-BENGAL
UPDATE (I)

REF: CALCUTTA 0535

1. UPDATE ON THE FACTS. SOME 50,000 DANDAKARANYA
REFUGEES HAVE SO FAR LEFT THE PROJECT AREA FOR WEST
BENGAL. THE ENTIRE PROJECT AREA CONTAINS THREE
PRINCIPAL RESETTLEMENT SITE IN ORISSA AND MADHYA PRADESH,
SPREAD AS FAR APART AS 100-150 MILES. NEARLY ALL THE
DESERTERS SO FAR APPEAR TO HAVE COME FROM THE MALKANGIRI
ZONE OF THE PROJECT AREA WHICH IS LOCATED IN THE FAR SOUTH
TIP OF ORISSA, ADMITTEDLY THE POOREST OF THE
THREE SITES.

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2;(FOR THE MOST PART THE DESERTERS ARE NOT TICKETLESS
TRAVELERS, BUT HAVE PURCHASED THEIR PASSAGES WITH THE
PROCEEDS OF THEIR MEAGER HOUSEHOLD EFFECTS SOLD BEFORE
LEAVING DANDAKARAYA. THEY HAVE COME BY TRAIN
(AS MANY AS THREE A DAY), BY BUS AND BY HIRED LORRIES.
THE GOWB HAS SO FAR MANAGED TO PUT SOME 8,000 ON

TRAINS (NO MORE THAN ONE A DAY) HEADED BACK FOR SOUTHERN ORISSA. THERE IS NO GUARANTEE HOW MANY OF THESE 8,000 WILL STAY BACK ON THE RESERVATION, OR INDEED THAT MANY HAVE NOT HOPPED OFF THE TRAIN EN ROUTE TO HEAD BACK FOR WEST BENGAL, WHERE SOME HAD MANAGED TO LEAVE PARTS OF THEIR FAMILY GROUPS. AT THIS POINT THEY ARE QUITE ADAMANT IN NOT WANTING TO RETURN TO DANDAKARANYA. THE GOWB, DESPITE THE LACK OF ANY LEGAL OR CONSTITUTIONAL BASE FOR SUCH REPARTRIATIONS, HAS USED MILDLY BUT NOT EXTREMELY COERCIVE MEASURES TO EFFECT THE MOVE. THE REFUGEES HAVE HAD MUCH EXPERIENCE WITH THIS FORM OF BEING SHOVED AROUND, AND ARE FAIRLY WILY IN RESISTING OR EVADING AUTHORITY. MEANWHILE THEY CONTINUE TO STREAM IN FROM ORISSA, ALTHOUGH THE CURRENT RATE IS NOT CLEAR, AS THEY HAVE TO USE DIFFERENT ROUTES TO AVOID ROADBLOCKS AND OTHER CHECK POINTS.

3. ALTHOUGH THE REFUGEES STREAM HAS FOLLOWED SEVERAL ROUTES WITHIN WEST BENGAL, THE GREATEST NUMBER, PERHPAS 30,000, HAVE SQUATTED DOWN AT HASNABAD, ON THE NORTHERN AEDGE OF THE SUNDARBANS AREA CLOSE TO THE BANGLADESH FRONTIER, FROM WHENCE THEY SEEK TO CROSS THE ICHCHAMATI RIVER TO GET INTO THE SUNDERBANS, THEIR ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE. AS OF YESTERDAY, AS MANY AS 14,000 HAD CROSSED THIS RIVER ANF WERE SPREAD OUT IN AN AREA WHICH LACKS FRESH

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DRINKING WATER TO THE SOUTH OF THE RIVER. WEST BENGAL POLICE ARE NOT MAKING A SERIOUS EFFORT TO STOP THIS RIVER TRANSIT.

4. IN THE HASNABAD AREA, LUTHERN WORLD SERVICE, OXFAM, AND AN INDIAN CHURCH BASED ORGANIZATION CALLED CASA (CHURCHES AUXILIARY FOR SOCIAL ACTION) HAVE BEEN ACTIVE WITH VACCINATIONS AGAINST CHOLERA AND TYPHOID, AND WHEAT, BEANS, AND MILK. LWS IS SINKING TUBE WELLS FOR DRINKING WATER. THE WEST BENGAL GOVERNMENT HAS ASKED THE ASSISTANCE OF THESE RELIEF AGENCIES AND IS GREATFUL FOR IT. ITS HEALTH PEOPLE ARE DOING THE IMMUNIZATIONS.

5. REACTIONS. THE CPM STATE GOVERNMENT IS ANXIOUS TO 1) STOP THE FLOW OF REFUGEES (ESTIMATES ARE THAT ONE MILLION WERE RESETTLED IN THE ENTIRE DANDAKARANYA PROJECT, SO THAT THERE COULD BE A MUCH LARGER INFLOW), AND 2) GET AS MANY AS POSSIBLE OF THOSE NOW HERE TO RETURN. FORCE WILL NOT BE USED. THE PRIME MINISTER, IN PUBLIC COMMENT, SHARES THE VIEW THAT THEY SHOULD RETURN, OR BE RETURNED, BUT HAS MADE NO OFFER OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE CENTER. THE

OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES CONTINUE FAIRLY SILENT ON THE ISSUE, EITHER WAITING TO CAPITALIZE ON IT LATER, OR NOT BEING QUITE SURE WHICH WAY THE MATTER WILL GO.

6. THE CONSUL GENERAL AND VISITING INDIAN DESK OFFICER AL THIBAUT DISCUSSED THE MATTER WITH CHIEF SECRETARY A. K. SEN ON APRIL 10, A FEW MINUTES PRIOR TO A PLANNED WB CABINET MEETING TO REVIEW TMK PROBLEM. SEN EXPRESSED THE PERSONAL VIEW, WHICH HE WAS BY NO MEANS SURE WOULD PREVAIL, THAT THE GOWB SHOULD DECLARE A MORATORIUM FOR A FEW DAYS, OR LONGER, ON THE REPATRIATION EFFORT, ALLOWING THE REFUGEES TO COOL DOWN A BIT, WHILE TRYING TO KEEP THEM AT HASNABAD, WHERE RELIEF EFFORTS WOULD BE CONTINUED. LATER WHEN A DIALOGUE CAN BE
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ESTABLISHED WITH THEIR LEADERS, A REPRESENTATIVE GROUP SHOULD BE TAKEN FOR A COMPLETE TOUR OF THE SUNDERBANS TO SHOW THEM HOW HARSH AND INHOSPITABLE AN AREA IT WOULD BE FOR SETTLEMENT (LACK OF ARABLE LAND, FRESH WATER, DEGREE OF EXPECTED FLOODING, ETC). AS IT IS NOW, HE SAID, NO ONE WILL LISTEN. IT IS A QUESTION OF SLOW PERSUASION. HE FELT ULTIMATELY THEY WILL HAVE TO BE GIVEN A RESETTLEMENT ALLOWANCE, WHICH HE HOPED WOULD BE PROVIDED BY THE CENTER, BUT, TO THE EXTENT THAT THE CENTER WOULD NOT COOPERATE FUNDING MIGHT HAVE TO COME FROM THE STATE. PERHAPS RS 1,000 A FAMILY MIGHT WOULD BE NEEDED. THE REFUGEES SOLD EVERYTHING BEFORE COMING: OXEN, IMPLEMENTS, BICYCLES, BEDDING, CLOTHING, EVERYTHING THAT COULD NOT BE CARRIED. THEY WOULD HAVE TO START OVER, WITH HELP FOR SEEDS, FERTILIZER, AND THE LIKE. BUT EVEN IF IT COST 1 OR 2 CORES OF RUPEES, IT WOULD IN HIS OPINION BE WELL WORTH IT TO THE STATE.

7. ANOTHER SENIOR GOWB FIGURE TOLD US THAT ULTIMATELY THE STATE MIGHT HAVE TO ABSORB AS MANY AS 100,000 DESERTERS AND TO MAKE SOME EFFORT TO RESETTLE THEM HERE, SEEKING AS MUCH HELP TO DO SO FROM THE CENTER AS POSSIBLE. SOME MIGHT MELT INTO THE WOODWORK IN THE STATE, BUT MANY WOULD HAVE TO BE SETTLED IN THE SUNDERBANS, PROBABLY AT THE EXPENSE OF THE WORLD WILDLIFE FUND'S PROJECT TIGER AND OF THAT AREA OF THE SUNDERBANS LEFT IN FOREST. THE WB MINISTER OF FORESTS HAS ALREADY RAISED A CRY OF ALARM AT THE PROSPECT.

8. A SEPARATE TELEGRAM WILL DISCUSS THE REASONS FOR THIS FAIRLY SUDDEN INFLUX OF DESERTERS FROM THE MALKANGIRI SECTION OF THE DANDAKARANYA PROJECT. PERKINS
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